

Private Members' Business

I would like to confirm once again that the Reform Party believes in the bargaining process and we do not want to interfere in the course of two parties coming to an agreement. We see final offer arbitration as a tool that is useful to both sides, labour and management.

There are three provinces in Canada that ban the use of replacement workers in strike or lockout situations: Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario. Just last week voters elected a Progressive Conservative government whose leader promised to repeal Bill 40, the NDP's labour legislation and put an end to the ban on replacement workers in Ontario. Perhaps my hon. colleague would do well to find out if there is public support for anti-worker legislation.

• (1815)

We in the Reform Party are concerned about the impact that strikes and lockouts have on workers, employers, and Canadians, who most often have to bear the brunt of the cost and inconvenience of services withdrawn by monopolistic industries.

The recent strikes in the railway emphasize the weakness in the Canada Labour Code for preventing a shutdown of essential services. I commend the member for attempting to deal with the contentious issue of maintaining essential services. However, this bill does not contain any provision for the continuation of essential services in the private sector.

We would all agree the federal government has a responsibility to act in the best interest of Canadians, but I am surprised the hon. member would increase the powers of the governor in council.

In an interdependent world, economic security is threatened by major strikes involving services that provide linkage on an inter-provincial and an international basis. Transportation and communication services, for example, are essential to the daily movement of people, goods, and services. A shutdown for any duration always has significant economic impacts.

Canada's competitive advantage is determined by the efficiency and reliability of the transportation and communication network it relies upon. We simply cannot afford any major shutdowns in the networks that link the country together.

The Canadian economy was hard hit by the \$3 billion railway strike in March. The effects of this strike are now seen as contributing factors in the lower than predicted gross domestic product and the fall of the leading economic indicators. This was a hit the Canadian economy could not afford to take.

I believe that if final offer arbitration had been in place it could have defused the problems that faced the parties in this dispute. It is by far the most effective and impartial means of obtaining a solution to the concerns of labour and management where an impasse occurs that inflicts significant damage on Canadians.

There is nothing to prevent both sides from achieving a deal, providing they are being fair and open with each other. In fact, the presence of an arbitrator who is in a position to adopt either side's proposal in entirety exerts a tremendous pressure on both sides to reach an agreement. I believe this would preserve and strengthen the process by which the parties negotiate a contract.

In cases where fundamental issues are at stake, such as employment security, an agreement might never occur through collective bargaining, and a strike or lockout may only make matters worse. The best solution is for someone respected by both sides to make a decision on the fairness of one proposal and for the process to be viewed as legitimate by both sides. Section 57 of the Canada Labour Code which contains provisions for final offer settlement by an arbitrator for disputes that occur during the life of a collective agreement should be amended to include final offer selection in disputes where collective agreements have expired.

I want to assure the House that I believe in the collective agreement process, but in the area of essential services the Canadian people should be protected from costly and disruptive work stoppages. Part I of the Canada Labour Code is under review at the moment. I urge the Minister of Labour to bring the code into line with today's economic realities by expanding the definition of essential services and by providing for final offer arbitration in work stoppages in essential services when the agreements expire.

The end result of a strike or lockout is that the side that is able to withstand the damage longest is considered to be the winner. In reality, we know that neither side wins. Both parties sustain significant losses in relationships and dollars. In the long run, no one benefits from a strike, not the workers, not the employers, and not the Canadian people. I believe this legislation would inflame already strained relations and drive a deeper wedge between labour and management.

• (1820)

The Canada Labour Code is out of date. As legislators, we must find and implement solutions that will best serve the needs of all involved.

[Translation]

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-317 whose purpose is to add